



CALIFORNIA EDUCATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVE | Unit 5.4.1. | Human Settlement and the Nat. Regions of the E. Seaboard | Information Cards Printed on post-consumer recycled paper



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Sturgeon

“[Sturgeons] are to be had in abundance observing... their seasons.”

John Smith, Virginia

“Sturgeons would also often leap into [Indian’s] Canoes, in crossing the River, as many of them do still every Year, into the Boats of the English.”

Robert Beverly, Virginia

Sturgeons were one of the first types of fish sold in the colonies. They were also the first cash crop harvested in Jamestown, Virginia. This means that Atlantic sturgeon made a lot of money for the colonists! (Lobster was the only seafood that cost more money than sturgeon.) These fish have no scales. They are very long. Adult sturgeons are between seven and twelve feet long. Sturgeons were used for more than food. Their skin was made into a leather material, used for clothing and books. Other parts were used in jellies, glues, and wines. Sturgeon eggs, called caviar, were a popular food.

“We have a great store of very wild fruits, such as cranberries. [They are] much like cherries for color and bigness [and] an excellent sauce is made of them for [deer], turkey and other [birds], and they are better [for] tarts than either gooseberries or cherries. We have them brought to our houses by American Indians.”

Anonymous, New Jersey

Cranberries are a small, red, tart fruit that grow along the eastern seaboard. Cranberries had many uses during the Colonial Era. American Indians used wild cranberries for food. Sometimes they cooked them with maple sugar to create a sweet sauce. Other times the berries were ground up and mixed with dry meat or fish, shaped into cakes, and dried in the sun. These cakes were called “pemmican.” Cranberries could also help sick people. For example, a paste made from cranberries, when applied to a cut, would help it heal faster. The juice of cranberries was used as a dye for rugs and blankets. Cranberries were often traded for other goods.



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Tobacco

“An herb so healthful that a description of its many virtues would require a volume by itself.”

Thomas Hariot

The dried leaves of tobacco plants are chewed or smoked. Europeans learned about tobacco from the American Indians. The American Indians smoked tobacco at important events. Initially, colonists and Europeans viewed tobacco only as a medicinal cure, but they quickly became addicted to tobacco and wanted to buy a lot of it. Tobacco was the main crop exported to Europe from America (especially from Jamestown). People did not just smoke tobacco. It was seen as a cure for many diseases. Others used tobacco to help them feel better when they were sick or had a bee sting.

In 1964, the first U.S. Surgeon General's report appeared reporting on the links between smoking and disease. Substantial research makes the clear connection between smoking and life-threatening diseases, such as lung cancer.



Turkeys

“These turkeys remain all the year long [and] may be in weight forty pound.”

William Wood, New England

Wild turkeys are not the same birds people enjoy at Thanksgiving. Thinner and stronger than turkeys raised for eating, wild turkeys are smart and have long legs and necks. Male turkeys, called, “toms” or “gobblers,” weigh about sixteen pounds. Female turkeys, called “hens,” weigh about nine pounds. An adult turkey stands about four feet tall. Turkeys are mostly covered in dark feathers, so they can hide in the woods. Their neck skin can change from red to white to blue when they are upset or excited! They eat acorns, berries, greens, grains, and insects. Turkeys do not fly south for the winter. They stay in the same place all year. Turkeys feed and travel in groups, called flocks, and sleep in the branches of trees. The hens lay between 10 and 18 eggs. The turkey provided food and feathers for the American Indians and colonists. Turkey feathers were used to make arrows and for decoration. Turkeys scare easily and some American Indians believed that eating turkeys would make you scared, too.



Corn



Hickory

Corn (Maize)

“Some [Indian corn] is white, some red, some yellow, and some blue... [they] all make a very good bread.”

Thomas Hariot

Every part of the corn plant was used in Northeastern America. Corn was easy to grow, dry, and store. The corn silk, which looks like hair, was used to make a tea when someone was sick. The green husks were used to wrap food. The stalks were used to feed animals, or they were hollowed out to hold salt or medicine. Husks were also used by American Indians to make baskets, mats, and shoes. The most important use of corn was, of course, food. People in America pounded corn into cornmeal. They did this so much that they kept corn pounders by their front doors. They also made food like tamales, tortillas, and even popcorn from the kernels.



Hickory trees grow in the Carolinas and in Virginia. Hickory nuts contain a lot of fat and nutrients. Both American Indians and colonists ate them. Colonists also fed hickory nuts to their pigs. The wood of hickory trees is hard but bendable. Colonists built many things with this wood. Hickory has a nice scent when burned, so people used it to smoke meats.

Mark Catesby

Hickory trees “grow mostly on good land [and are] an excellent wood for burning.”

Hickory



Beaver

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Witch Hazel

Beaver

“The wisdom and understanding of [the beaver]” almost makes him seem
“a reasonable creature.”

William Wood, New England

Beavers are large rodents with strong teeth. They can cut down trees the size of an adult human! Beavers live on land and in the water. They are very social creatures that help each other build dams and shelters. American Indians and colonists hunted beaver for their fur. Beavers in the northern colonies had thicker fur to protect them from the cold. In Europe, beaver furs were made into hats and coats. People used other parts of the beaver for medicine and perfume. Some people also ate beaver meat.

Beaver populations disappeared very quickly in New England as the English population rose and the American Indian population fell. Beaver dams disappeared. Colonists began to build homes and towns on land that had once been under water.



as medicine.

Well into the 1800s, the people of the eastern seaboard used witch hazel and other herbs

noses. It also helped with bug bites, sores, and tumors.

use of witch hazel was as a medicine. Witch hazel stopped swelling, bleeding, and runny

water to grow. Thus, they could find water in the ground where the shrubs grew. The main

used witch hazel to find water underground. They knew that witch hazel needs a lot of

hazel produces flowers and fruit. American Indians liked to eat the seeds. Some people

Witch hazel is a shrub that grows up to thirty feet tall. The branches are forked. Witch

Witch Hazel



White Pine



Ginseng



White Pine

Huge forests of Eastern white pine covered the mountains and valleys on the eastern seaboard in the 1600s. Like other pine trees, the white pine has needle-like leaves and seeds that are protected by cones. The trunks of the Eastern white pine are particularly tall and straight. The needles have five times more Vitamin C in them than lemons do.

American Indians used the seeds of the white pine as food, and used the sap as medicine and to make their baskets and boats waterproof. In times when other food was scarce, the inner bark of the tree was eaten too. Because of its properties, the white pine became a symbol of peace to the American Indian nations that were a part of the Iroquois League.

The wood of the white pine was used by the colonists. The trees were easy to cut down, and the wood is soft and knot-free. The colonists used the white pine to build almost everything—from whole houses to wooden toys. The center of the tree, the hardwood, can be very hard. This made the trunks of the white pine perfect for use as masts on the tall ships from Europe. In fact, once the colonists “discovered” white pines on the eastern seaboard, the British began to build special ships that could carry 50 white pine trunks at a time back to Europe to make into masts.

Ginseng “tricks the spirits.”

William Byrd

American Indians used ginseng to help them stay awake and digest their food. Ginseng also helped in the treatment of fevers and coughs. Some people thought it helped you fall in love! American colonists did not use ginseng much, but the Chinese did. So the colonists shipped ginseng to China. Ginseng sold there earned more money for the colonists than furs or tobacco. It made some of them rich.

Ginseng